

1). Introduction

Mr. Speaker ... I rise to present the 2017 Ontario Budget.

Four years ago, our government promised to balance the Budget.

And today, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce...

...thanks to the hard work of the people of Ontario...

We did it!

The 2017 Ontario Budget...is a balanced Budget.

And I want to thank my colleagues...

And my staff and our hard-working Ontario public servants in the Ministry of Finance and the Treasury Board...

Who have worked tirelessly to prepare these documents today ...

[In particular, I would like to thank Deputy Ministers Scott Thompson and Helen Angus and Assistant Deputy Minister, Tim Schuurman for their dedication and efforts.]

And ... above all ... I'd like to thank Premier Wynne for her steady leadership in delivering on our commitment to the people of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker ... I want to take a moment to look back at how far we have come.

Because the road to balance has not been easy.

Our government had balanced three consecutive budgets before the recession...

Before the financial markets across the globe melted down in 2008.

After that fateful year, Mr. Speaker ... we had critical choices to make.

We could do what some suggested: cut expenses ... cut vital programs and services that people depended on, to eliminate the deficit.

Or take a more principled and thoughtful approach:

To make strategic investments and stimulate economic growth.

So we chose to invest in our people.

Invest in our economy.

Invest in Ontario's recovery.

So that Ontario families could get through the recession and out the other side without losing their homes ...

So that Ontario's kids could continue to get a great education ... and prepare for their future.

And so that our moms and dads and grandparents could go see a doctor ... and get well quickly.

Mr. Speaker for our government ... there was no question:

Ontario families mattered most.

We knew that making crucial investments was the right thing to do for our people.

We knew that making crucial investments was what our economy needed.

We chose to invest in hospitals, schools, roads and bridges and public transit.

We made sure more young people graduated high school than ever before ...

And we took a principled approach to protecting workers ... and jobs in the auto sector.

We helped businesses grow by cutting corporate taxes to make them more competitive.

Those choices positioned us well when the recession ended.

And we have grown.

Mr. Speaker, nearly 700,000 net new jobs have been created since the depths of the recession.

And the majority of those are well-paying jobs ... full-time jobs ... and private-sector jobs.

Our unemployment rate is below the national average and the lowest it's been since 2007.

our economy is growing...and leading.

Last year, our GDP grew by 2.7 per cent.

That's almost twice the rate of growth of all of Canada.

It's better than Germany's 1.9 per cent.

It's better than the United States at 1.6 per cent.

It's better than all G7 countries.

So how did we get here, Mr. Speaker?

Back in 2008 ... at the same time that we were investing in our people ...

We were also starting to chip away ... year after year ... at the deficit.

By controlling spending and finding savings.

So ... in 2009...when we were at the depth of the recession and when Ontarians needed their government most...the deficit was 19 billion ...

Then in 2011...as the impacts of the recession persisted... the deficit was down to 13 billion ...

In 2014 ...as Ontario showed clear signs of recovery and new jobs came on stream, it was 10 billion ...

Last fiscal year, as Ontario became an economic leader in Canada...it was two billion...

And now ... I am pleased to announce that we will be balancing the Budget this year.

And next year and the year after, we're projecting it to be balanced, too.

And the people of Ontario can count on it.

We got here because we had a plan to grow the economy.

Year after year ... budget after budget ...

We stuck to that plan ... relentlessly ...

...keeping our people and our delicate recovery on track ...

Until we achieved our goal.

And Speaker ... as we returned to balance...

We also strengthened the vital services and programs Ontarians rely on.

We rolled out full-day kindergarten across our province...

Introduced free tuition for eligible postsecondary students ...

To ensure that everyone achieves their potential, regardless of their families' incomes.

Because people are our competitive advantage.

We improved health care, too.

We added nurses and doctors to Ontario's health care system.

Provided free dental services to more than 365,000 children and youth from low-income families.

And expanded mental health for more than 50,000 children and youth.

We stimulated job growth ...

And created a plan to reduce household electricity bills by an average of 25 per cent for each and every family in Ontario.

Speaker ... I ask my fellow Ontarians to consider ... if we moved our province forward in all those important ways while we were recovering ...

Imagine what we can do now ... now that we're in a stronger position.

Well, Speaker ... together we have built up Ontario to compete and win in the global economy ...

And now we believe it's time to consider what comes next.

Because a balanced budget is never an end in itself.

For Ontarians, this is just a beginning ... a balanced Budget gives us the means to shape our future and build a more caring society.

The goal for all of us...I believe...is a better quality of life, a more inclusive society, a more caring Ontario.

That gives us the competitive advantage — because more and more of the world these days is looking inward.

But by declaring ... loudly ... proudly ... and unequivocally ...

We are building a stronger Ontario ... we will attract the best and brightest to live, work and raise their families ...right here.

And build an Ontario that is just as compassionate as it is competitive.

Mr. Speaker ... today, we take the next step in building that Ontario.

2). Staying Strong

It starts, Mr. Speaker ... with protecting the gains we have made so far.

And staying strong.

That means continuing to help our highly educated and talented young people find great, rewarding careers.

So, Mr. Speaker, to help students find great jobs when they graduate, we're launching the "Career Kick-Start Strategy."

We will work with our colleges and universities, employers and other partners to help more students gain work-related experience during their studies.

We will invest nearly \$190 million over three years to help create 40,000 new work-related learning opportunities..

More for high school and postsecondary students, as well as recent grads, will hit the ground running when they graduate.

And the result will be that all-important first bullet on their resumé.

And to help make the transition into the workforce easier...

...recent grads will not have to start repaying the provincial portion of their OSAP loan...

...until they start making \$35,000 a year.

We believe that learning is a lifelong journey, Mr. Speaker.

So for adults looking to find their next learning opportunity, land a better job or move into their next career, we're launching the "Ontario Lifelong Learning and Skills Plan."

This will help adults get the literacy, numeracy and digital skills they need to thrive in a changing economy.

We will also recalibrate our Second Career program...

...which was critical for unemployed workers during the recession...

...to better respond to the changing economy by enhancing workers' skills to adapt or to find their next job.

And to make sure no one is ever left behind, we will strengthen Ontario's income security and labour laws.

Mr. Speaker, we are also proud to launch a basic income pilot.

To see if providing people with a basic income could be a simpler and more effective way to ensure security and opportunity in a changing job market...

....support people living on low incomes...

...and reduce poverty.

Our priority is all about jobs, created by thriving businesses.

To continue strengthening businesses, we will maintain our competitive corporate income tax rates, and continue to modernize regulations and reduce business costs.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that we will also stay at the forefront of the global shift to a new economy ...

We will continue to tackle climate change in a way that produces a cleaner environment, builds a low-carbon economy and creates jobs.

We will not turn our backs on science or future generations.

Our Climate Change Action Plan and emissions capping program are already delivering results – and helping to improve our day-to-day quality of life while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

For example, Mr. Speaker, we are investing \$200 million this year to improve the energy efficiency of our schools.

We are also making it easier for households and businesses to adopt proven, low-carbon technologies through the Green Ontario Fund.

Mr. Speaker, we will also embrace and invest in transformative technologies in fields like artificial intelligence,

Fifth-generation wireless technology, advanced computing and quantum technologies.

And to continue to lead the way in the auto sector, we'll be investing \$80 million to create the Autonomous Vehicle Innovation Network.

This innovation network will include a new Demonstration Zone in Stratford to test this new technology.

Speaker, we will also continue to help people and goods move faster.

We are increasing options for commuters, by providing faster and more frequent service on the GO rail network to building light rail transit in Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto.

And Speaker, I am pleased to announce that we are proposing to help more people to use these systems in all regions of the province by providing seniors 65 and over with a new, non-refundable public transit tax credit.

What's more, we're expanding northern highways and repairing roads and bridges in rural communities.

That's why I am pleased to announce that our plan to invest roads and public transportation, as well as in hospitals and schools, has grown to more than \$190 billion over 13 years, starting in 2013-14.

This is the greatest infrastructure investment in our province's history.

Finally, Speaker ... one of the strengths of the Ontario economy has been the possibility for most people to afford their own home, should they choose.

A strong housing market reflects Ontario's strong economy.

But it is also making it difficult for many to buy their first home.

To put down roots.

Build up equity for their futures.

That's why we doubled the maximum refund for first-time home buyers...

And froze property taxes on new apartment buildings to ensure costs are not being unfairly passed on to renters.

We want to protect homeowners and avoid unintended consequences of new policies to temper the housing market in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

So that's why our next steps will be thoughtful and measured, too.

Over the past six months, our government has been meeting with experts and other levels of government to discuss ways to help Ontario families.

The issue of home affordability is complex ... but at its core there is a simple principle:

It's not fair for some speculators ... with deep pockets ... to drive up the cost of a family home ...

At the expense of working families ... trying to save enough ... to realize their own dreams of a place to raise their kids ...

And call their own.

Recently, there has been growing consensus, including comments by Bank of Canada governor Stephen Poloz, that speculators are playing a role in driving up prices.

So we are moving forward with the Fair Housing Plan for Ontario.

We'll crack down on property scalpers who are preventing people from being able to buy in new developments ...

As well as propose a 15 per cent non-resident speculation tax, or NRST.

This measure is not meant to deter investment.

Many outside investors are already taking advantage of favourable exchange rates.

Ontario remains a terrific place to do business and invest.

People are attracted here.

Because we have a growing economy, stable banking and judicial systems, strong universal health care and public education.

And we want people from around the world to continue to invest in our province.

However, we believe that in the absence of living here and contributing to the local economy, speculators should pay their fair share.

Mr. Speaker, we will also expand rent control across the province...

...to strengthen protections for tenants...

...while also providing incentives for more multi residential rental apartment buildings to be built by rebating a portion of development charges.

Furthermore, we are reducing red tape that's slowing down building approvals by continuing to work with our municipal partners to expedite supply.

In Toronto, we are proposing to give the City the option to tax vacant units. This will help encourage owners to rent their units, increasing supply.

And all municipalities will have greater power to spur housing development on vacant lots by having the right to provide a higher tax on services land that have been approved for housing development.

This would help address supply and make housing more available and affordable, particularly in large urban centres such as Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa.

These new policies represent a comprehensive action plan to address Ontario's rising housing costs...

...so that families can access housing that meets their needs.

And taken together ... these measures to keep Ontario competitive ...

Will give us the means to continue building a more caring Ontario.

3). Supporting People Who Care

Speaker ... all of us have cared for someone who needed our help.

Maybe a child ... or a parent.

Some of us are sandwiched between supporting our children and caring for our aging parents.

While we have excellent public health care and strong community health services...

It is families who step up and stand with their loved ones in need.

And Mr. Speaker, we want to honour that choice.

So our first step in building an even more compassionate Ontario will be to provide more supports to caregivers.

Whether you are caring for a child, or an aging parent, or a loved one with a mental health illness or special needs...

We want to help lighten the load a little.

So, we are providing \$20M in respite care to people who volunteer to care for a loved one — such as seniors, people living with dementia and other home care patients.

This funding will provide for personal support services or nursing support at home, allowing caregivers scheduled breaks from performing their critical work.

We also recognize the financial strain that caregivers can feel, so we are proposing a new Ontario Caregiver Tax Credit.

We know caregivers can feel isolated and overwhelmed.

So, starting this fall, we'll be providing education and training to volunteer caregivers.

And we are moving forward with a new organization designed to support and connect caregivers.

Because, Speaker, we stand with those who choose to care.

4). Caring About Our Kids' Futures

We have long known, Mr. Speaker ... that how far our kids go in life ...

Is profoundly affected by how they start.

That's why we are helping 100,000 more children get access to affordable, quality licensed child care.

This year, our investments will help 24,000 more children through new fee subsidies and licensed child care spaces in schools.

Mr. Speaker ... these new supports will reduce waitlists ...

...giving more parents more choice when it comes to balancing work and family.

We also believe that every child should have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

So, Speaker, we will continue to invest in our world-renowned public education system.

We will introduce new class size caps on full-day kindergarten classes and enhanced supports for students with special needs.

And we are investing almost \$16 billion over 10 years to help build new schools in high-growth areas and improve the conditions of existing schools.

We are currently building 95 new schools across the province...

...and renovating 54 existing ones.

There's more...

We are transforming OSAP by repurposing existing credits and supports...

That means more than 210,000 college and university students will get free tuition this fall ...

...ensuring that pursuing post-secondary education is based on your ability to learn, not your ability to pay.

To help more students access French-language postsecondary education, we have asked experts in our francophone community to provide advice on planning for a new French-language university.

And to help more First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners access high-quality postsecondary education and training, we are investing \$200 million over the next three years.

This includes dedicated funding to nine Indigenous-owned and operated Aboriginal Institutes across Ontario.

Speaker ... making sure all our children have what they need to succeed ...

From their earliest years ...

...to graduation and into a job... not only shows that we care about their well-being

But that we believe in their success.

And by investing in that success, we are also ensuring that Ontario has what it needs to compete and win in the global economy.

5). Investing in Health Care

Mr. Speaker ... as Ontarians...

As Canadians...

One of the main ways we show we care for one another is through our universal system of health care.

In Ontario ... if you wind up in the hospital, you don't have to mortgage your home ... just to pay the bills.

We have you covered.

Each of us looks after all of us.

And in a world where not everyone enjoys that same caring, comfort and security — I think we cherish our health care system all the more.

But that doesn't mean we can't do even more.

In the lead up to this Budget, I travelled across Ontario...

...to speak with people...

...to hear what matters most to them.

Everywhere I went, Ontarians told me:

Invest more in our Health Care.

Invest more in our Hospitals.

A balanced Budget allows us to make these new investments.

So, Speaker, to meet the needs of our patients today and in the future, we are investing another\$5 billion over three years.

This will reduce wait times.

This will improve access to care.

This will enhance people's experience and speed up their recovery.

A growing and aging population is placing more demands on our health care system.

We want to ensure people get the health care they need, when and where they need it.

So we will be investing a further\$1 billion over three years to reduce wait times.

To get surgery faster ...

To help you see a specialist faster.

To expand home and community care services.

And to help more people get vital mental health and addictions services.

We will make targeted investments in MRIs and diagnostic equipment, cataract and cardiovascular surgeries, and hip or knee replacements.

And, to make sure our towns and communities have the hospital services they need ...

We will build new hospitals across Ontario to meet the wide-ranging needs of our growing communities.

Let me give you just a few examples.

We are redeveloping Hamilton Health Sciences, to help more people in Hamilton get the care they need.

We are expanding and renovating both the Mississauga Hospital and Queensway Health Centre, to serve more patients in Peel Region

And we are committing to a new hospital to serve the health care needs of people along the James Bay coast.

But Mr. Speaker, we also know that some of the best care is community care.

So we are expanding community and personal support services to help meet these growing demands...

...and to support faster and more equitable access across the province.

As well, to improve the care and quality of life for those living in long-term care, we are encouraging operators to redevelop more than 30,000 beds.

And for people already living in a long-term care facility, we will improve comfort and privacy by hiring more staff and eliminating four-bed wards.

And finally, Mr. Speaker ...

One way we can be both a competitive and a compassionate society is to make sure that people who need medication ... get medication.

For many families with no drug plan ... getting prescriptions filled can be a challenge.

Causing real hardships for some.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better than that.

And we will.

That is why ... I am pleased to announce...

...on behalf of our Premier...

...Starting this January ...

We will be expanding universal health care...

...by providing free drug coverage for everyone age 24 and under.

We're calling it OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare.

Mr. Speaker, let me be clear: it will now be available to all, regardless of family income...

...and it will completely cover the cost of all medicines funded through the Ontario Drug program.

There will be no deductible, there will be no co-payment.

Ontario's program will be the first of its kind in Canada.

Speaker, this historic investment in the health of our kids ... and all the other investments we are making ... show what Ontario can do when we are strong ...

When we are determined ...

When we balance competition and compassion ...

And when we balance our budgets.

6). Conclusion:

Mr. Speaker ... this year Ontario will be celebrating 150 years as a province ...

Within our great nation of Canada.

From Bay Street to Hudson Bay.

From the Ambassador Bridge to Embassy Row ...

And everywhere in between ...

It is a time to look back on what we have achieved...

...together.

We have so much to be proud of.

A society built on tolerance, respect, diversity and inclusion.

But while we look to the past with pride...

...today is also a day to look forward to the future with confidence.

This Budget writes a new chapter for the people of Ontario.

This Budget sets a new course for our province.

Building on our balanced approach...

We will invest in those things that set us apart.

Making further investments in our education system.

So that our schools remain places where our children want to go to learn...and can realize their full potential.

We will invest free college and university tuition for eligible students – so that acceptance is based on a person's ability to learn, not their ability to pay.

We will make further investments in our healthcare system...

To ensure our hospitals are clean, modern and equipped with the latest technologies...

To help us see a doctor or nurse faster, and help more of us care for a family member.

And we will provide medicine for all of us who are 24 and under when we are sick.

We will invest in our infrastructure...

...so our new roads, highways and public transportation get people to work quicker, and home at night safely to their families...

We will develop partnerships, expanding opportunities and improve the quality of life in Indigenous communities...

...in a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect.

This new Budget will help more of our families buy a home.

And provide relief on our household electricity bills.

This balanced budget is the dividend every Ontarian has earned.

For supporting each other during the recession.

For remaining true to our principles.

Speaker ... let it always be said that in Ontario ...

We are as compassionate ... as we are competitive...

As fair... as we are prosperous.

And that balance... one that is at the heart of our civil society...

Is just as important as the fiscal balance we have announced today.

Together ... we will create a brighter future for our children.

Together ... we will create a stronger, healthier Ontario.

Thank you, Speaker.